



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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MORE THAN 2 TONS OF COCAINE SEIZED IN MULTI-AGENCY OPERATION

Nine-member crew from five different countries now in federal custody

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico—Humberto S. Garcia, U.S. Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico; Lydia St. John-Mellado, Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); Jerome Harris, Special Agent in Charge, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); Luis Fraticelli, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Captain James Tunstall, Commander, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Sector San Juan, and Commander Sim Schot, Commanding Officer, Royal Netherlands Navy, HRMS Van Amstal, announced today the seizure of 4,488 pounds of cocaine on board the Bolivian-flagged vessel M/V Sea Atlantic at approximately 150 nautical miles off the coast of Aruba. The seizure was part of Operation Caribbean Corridor, an investigative/law enforcement initiative by ICE, DEA, FBI and USCG in the Caribbean Basin.

The Sea Atlantic, sailing under the Bolivian flag, raised the interest of law enforcement organizations operating as part of Operation Caribbean Corridor. After a successful cooperation between the USCG, the international counter drug organization Joint Inter Agency Task Force South, the Royal Netherlands Navy, and the Coast Guard for the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, more than 65 bales of cocaine were found in a hidden compartment on board the ship.

In the early morning of Aug. 27, the USCG Law Enforcement Detachment (permanently stationed onboard the Royal Netherlands Navy Ship) boarded the motor vessel, assisted by a Royal Netherlands Navy Maritime security Team. Later that morning, they found 68 bales (approximately 4,488 pounds) of a powdery substance that tested positive for cocaine during a field test.

The crew of the M/V Sea Atlantic was arrested and the ship was escorted to Puerto Rico by the USCG Cutter Vigorous. The following crew members of the M/V Sea Atlantic are now in federal custody:

- Alicides Rodriguez Duran, 38, citizen of Venezuela
- Carlos Julio Almonte, 59, citizen of Dominican Republic
- Gandaogo Minoungou, 42, citizen of Burkina Faso

- Nii Klaku Okley, 39, citizen of Ghana
- Ruberts Jose Gonzalez Valero, 29, citizen of Venezuela
- Ronald Jose Morelis, 32, citizen of Venezuela
- Julio Cesar de la Rosa, 34, citizen of Dominican Republic
- Reinaldo Jose Cabello, 42, citizen of Venezuela
- Alberto Javier Padilla, 36, citizen of Mexico

“ICE and the other federal agencies in Operation Caribbean Corridor--DEA, FBI and the U.S. Coast Guard--are working together, efficiently and intelligently to stop the transshipment of drugs and other contraband in the Caribbean Basin,” said Lydia St. John-Mellado, special agent in charge of ICE investigations in Puerto Rico. “ICE will continue using all its resources to fight and win the war against drugs in this part of the world.”

"U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement detachments have a proud and successful history of intercepting contraband with the Dutch navy in the Caribbean. With the aggressive work of ICE, DEA and the FBI in Operation Caribbean Corridor, our collective resources are maximized as we work together to keep drugs off the streets." Said Captain James Tunstall, Commander, USCG, Sector San Juan.

The U.S. Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico has accepted this case for prosecution. The public is reminded that a criminal complaint only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial and the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.